Volunteers in Service to America – VISTA

Program Guidance
Fiscal Year 2010
October 1, 2009 – September 30, 2010

Contents

Introduction

The purpose of the FY 2010 VISTA Programming Guidance is to inform stakeholders, including current and prospective sponsors, of the programmatic highlights for the fiscal year. This guidance is intended to direct the development of VISTA projects, and outline the national programming priorities for the VISTA program.

Key Changes in Fiscal Year 2010

Section	Topic	Change
I	Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program	Added emphasis in DVSA, as amended by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009*, on supporting efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects.
III	Programming Areas	Adds list of VISTA programming areas under the DVSA, as amended by the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 Deletes section on Strategic Initiatives
VI	Project Models	Highly encourages use of prime plus sub model for multi-state projects Notes the status for the development of national demonstration projects in FY2010
VII	My AmeriCorps	Adds a section describing the My AmeriCorps Portal

*On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Serve America Act). The Serve America Act reauthorized and expanded national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Notable changes introduced by the Serve America Act that affect the VISTA program are reflected in this guidance. Additional information about the Serve America Act is available at
http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/serveamerica/index.asp.

I. Overview of AmeriCorps VISTA Program

AmeriCorps VISTA is the national service program designed specifically to fight poverty. Authorized in 1964 and founded in 1965 as Volunteers in Service to America, the program was incorporated into the AmeriCorps network of programs in 1993. VISTA has been on the front lines in the fight against poverty in America for more than 44 years.

VISTA supports efforts to alleviate poverty by encouraging individuals from all walks of life to engage in a year of full-time service, without regard to regular working hours, with a sponsoring organization (sponsor) to create or expand programs designed to bring individuals and communities out of poverty.

About VISTA Sponsors
Public, private, Tribal, and faith-based nonprofit organizations—as well as local, state and federal organizations can apply to be a sponsor. Sponsors must be able to direct the project, recruit and supervise the VISTAs, and provide necessary administrative support to complete the goals of the project. Sponsors develop and manage projects with the involvement of the communities that will be served.

Organizations can apply to become a sponsor by visiting http://www.americorps.gov or contacting the Corporation State Office in their state.

About VISTAs
VISTAs come from all walks of life. They live and serve in some of our nation's poorest areas. Each VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project with a sponsor. In return for their service, VISTAs receive a modest living allowance and health benefits during their service, and have the option of receiving a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award or end-of-service cash stipend after completing their service.

In fiscal year 2010, more than 7.000 VISTAs funded by FY 2010 appropriations and approximately 3,000 VISTAs funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 will serve with over 1,000 sponsors. They will leverage human, financial, and material resources to develop self-sustaining solutions to problems in low-income communities across the country.

Individuals can apply to become a VISTA online at www.americorps.gov/vista.

The Purpose of VISTA

VISTA is a federal program charged with alleviating poverty in the United States. Since its authorization in 1964, its purpose has been:
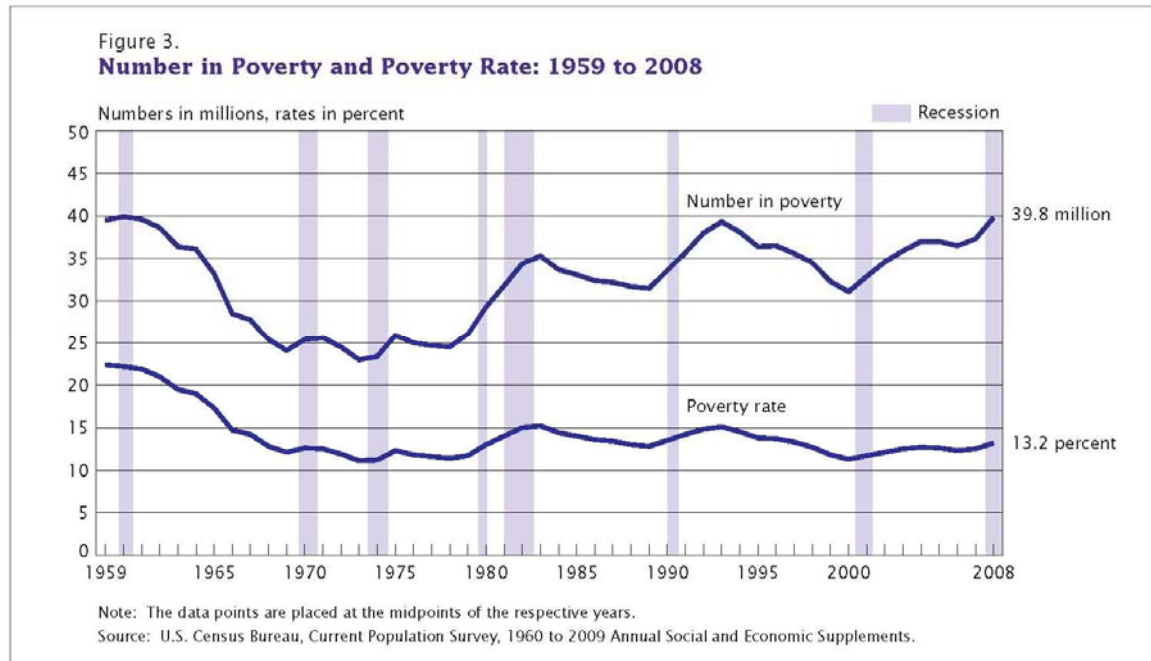
> *to strengthen and supplement efforts to eliminate and alleviate poverty and poverty-related problems in the United States by encouraging and enabling persons from all walks of life, all geographical areas, and all age groups, including low-income individuals, elderly and retired Americans, to perform meaningful and constructive volunteer service in agencies, institutions, and situations where the application of human talent and dedication may assist in the solution of poverty and poverty-related problems and secure and increase opportunities for self-advancement by persons affected by such problems.*

To understand how the VISTA program carries out its purpose, it is helpful to consider a few characteristics of poverty in the United States, which has many faces and causes.

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, which reports the official poverty measure in the United States, 39.8 million people lived in poverty in 2008. As shown in the graph below, the nation's official poverty rate in 2008 was 13.2 percent, up from 12.5 percent in 2007. To determine who is in poverty, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition. If a family's total income is less than the federal threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered to be living in poverty.

For example, to be considered poor in 2008, a family of four living in the continental U.S. would have an income of less than the federal threshold of $22,025.

Graph: US Census Bureau (http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty08/graphs08.html)

Figure 3.
Number in Poverty and Poverty Rate: 1959 to 2008

Numbers in millions, rates in percent

Number in poverty — 39.8 million
Poverty rate — 13.2 percent

Note: The data points are placed at the midpoints of the respective years.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, 1960 to 2009 Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

- Some people live in poverty for a short time as the result of a situational circumstance such as unemployment, chronic illness, disability, divorce, or death of a family member. Nearly 40% of those entering poverty had a household member lose a job. Employment is the most common trigger event for exiting poverty (10.5%) (Transition Events in the Dynamics of Poverty, 2002, The Urban Institute).

- Of Americans living below the poverty line, about 75% are in generational poverty, which refers to people living in poverty for two or more generations. Without interventions, it is very likely that people living in generational poverty will remain in this state for the remainder of their lives. Studies suggest that the longer a person has been poor, the less likely it is that he or she will escape poverty (PSID, University of Michigan). Further, without interventions, it is also very likely that their children will join them in remaining in poverty.   Individuals in generational poverty often do not see a choice or know how to access proper resources.

- In 2004, 16 million Americans lived in "severe poverty," according to the U.S. Census Bureau (people living at less than half of the poverty level; e.g., an individual making $4,800 per year or less).   Approximately 3.5 million individuals experience homelessness in the U.S. each year. Of that number, about 600,000 are families and 1.35 million children (National Alliance to End Homelessness).

Because there is no single path into or out of poverty, with many events throwing people into poverty and many events helping people exit from poverty, the VISTA program supports locally-

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driven solutions to fighting poverty. Specifically, as noted in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act, the program is designed:

- To generate the commitment of private sector resources.

- To encourage volunteer service at the local level.

- To support efforts by local agencies and community organizations to achieve long-term sustainability of projects.

- To strengthen local agencies and community organizations to carry out the objectives of this part.

Accordingly, in choosing which applications to support, VISTA projects and sponsors are evaluated based on their capability to support the VISTA program through efforts of building long-term solutions to poverty in their community. A project must:

- Involve beneficiaries in project development and implementation throughout the life of the project.

- Address the needs of low-income communities and otherwise comply with the provisions of the Domestic Volunteer Services Act Of 1973, (DVSA) as amended (42 U.S.C. 4951 et seq.) applicable to VISTA and all applicable published regulations, guidelines and Corporation policies.

- Lead to building organizational and/or community capacity to continue the efforts of the project once VISTA resources are withdrawn.

- Describe in measurable terms the anticipated self-sufficiency results at the conclusion of the project, including the sustainability of the project activities.

- Clearly state how VISTAs will be trained, supervised, and supported to ensure the achievement of program goals and objectives.

- Be internally consistent; the problem statement which demonstrates need, the project plan, the assignment, and all other components must be related logically to each other.

- Ensure that VISTA and community resources are sufficient to achieve project goals.

- Have the management and technical capability to implement the project successfully.

- Have an appropriate number of requested VISTAs to match the project goals; the skills and qualifications described in the application must be appropriate for the assignment(s).

II. Framework for VISTA Programming

VISTA projects contain the elements required by law, are driven by the needs of the local community, are developed and implemented with the people who are beneficiaries of the project, and are a part of a diverse portfolio of projects.

Effective Programming Characteristics

Programming priorities are derived from local, state and national needs or trends, and they may change over time as needs change.

Programming should be primarily based on addressing local needs, and the Corporation State Office should be guided by locally-driven programming.

Key Principles

Each VISTA project must be developed in accordance with the parameters defined by law, federal regulations, and the key VISTA principles: Anti-poverty Focus, Capacity Building, Sustainable Solutions, and Community Empowerment.

Anti-Poverty Focus

As previously noted, by law, the purpose of VISTA is to support efforts to fight poverty. The goal of every project must be to help individuals and communities out of poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. The project should focus on long-term solutions rather than short-term services.

Community Empowerment

Organizations working with VISTA must ensure that the project engages residents of the low-income community in planning, developing, and implementing the project. The project must be responsive and relevant to the lives of the community residents, and should tap into inherent community strengths and resources.

This is not only required by law and federal regulation, it is also a highly effective practice for programming that supports lasting change in the community. It allows low-income individuals the freedom to speak for themselves in determining the projects that suit their specific needs. It often results in innovative programming, as well as meaningful experiences for the VISTAs.

The Corporation State Office ensures that an applicant sufficiently involves project beneficiaries. If the potential VISTA sponsors' board of directors is not is not made up of at least 51% of the low-income beneficiary community, they must create an advisory group with a composition of at least 51% of its members from the low income community. The role of the board or advisory group is:

- To the extent practical, assist the sponsor in the initial planning of a new project proposal and in the planning of a continuation project application.

- To review and provide written comments concerning any project application prior to the submission of the application. A copy of such comments shall accompany the application.

- To the extent practical, convene with the sponsor's staff at periodic intervals, but no less than twice per project year, for the purpose of reviewing and commenting on the development and implementation of the project. Such project review and commentary should be directed toward the adequacy of the project to meet the identified needs of the project beneficiaries.

- To submit, if it so chooses, written reports and/or copies of minutes of its meetings to the sponsor to accompany the Project Progress Report.

Sustainable Solutions

As originally designated in the Domestic Volunteer Service Act and reinforced in the Serve America Act, VISTA members represent a short-term resource who work to build the long-term sustainability of anti-poverty programs. All VISTA projects should be developed with a goal of an

eventual phase-out of the need for VISTA members and the ability of the project to continue without them.

VISTA projects typically last three to five years. From the beginning of the project planning process, the sponsor and community must think about how to use the VISTA project to phase in other resources and systems to replace the VISTA resource.

Mobilizing community resources helps to ensure that antipoverty activities will continue long after the VISTA resource is withdrawn. The following conditions are necessary for achieving sustainability through VISTA programming:
- The commitment, energy, and initiative that the VISTA brings to the community
- The involvement of the sponsoring organization in project supervision, support, self-assessment, and planning
- The participation of the project beneficiaries in all phases of project development and implementation
- The continued participation of the community through the provision of volunteers, material and financial resources, and expertise

The sponsor and Corporation must regularly monitor progress towards sustainability to ensure that progressive steps are taken toward the eventual absorption of project initiatives by the sponsor and the community.

Capacity Building

VISTAs are assigned to sponsors to expand the ability of organizations to fight poverty. Through activities such as fundraising, establishment of volunteer recruitment and management systems, community outreach, and partnership development, VISTAs help sponsors to achieve lasting solutions to poverty.

Examples of capacity building include:

- Helping sponsors develop <u>new</u> programs and services or <u>expand</u> existing programs and services

- Helping sponsors <u>improve</u> the quality of existing programs and services

- Increasing the number of low-income beneficiaries served through programs and services provided by the sponsor organization

- Improving service utilization by beneficiaries (e.g., more of them stay in a program long enough to experience real benefits)

- Assisting with partnerships and collaborations

- Helping to improve organizational infrastructure (e.g., by developing volunteer recruitment and training systems or developing and revising policies and procedures)

- Increasing organizational resources by establishing or expanding a pool of volunteers to assist with programs and services

- Increasing financial resources and helping to build sustainable funding streams for organizations

- Conducting public outreach to increase participation in programs and services

In order to build capacity, VISTAs do not perform direct service. VISTAs are community mobilizers, not temporary employees. Ideally, VISTAs work themselves out of a job and create systems that remain long after their service ends.

NOTE: For organizations that want to receive resources to build their capacity and infrastructure independent of creating or enhancing anti-poverty programming, the Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act of 2009 creates a grant program for Nonprofit Capacity Building. Specific information on this new program is not yet available. Please visit the Corporation's website in the future to get information on that new funding resource.

Ensure a Diversified Portfolio

It is the responsibility of each Corporation State Office to ensure that their current portfolio of VISTA projects is diverse, both in terms of programmatic areas as well as geography. An additional factor to consider is the type of sponsors – from small grassroots organizations to large intermediary agencies.

VISTA projects have an average lifecycle of three-five years; new project development takes place throughout the year. However, there may be a waiting period for final project approval and ensuing VISTA placement depending on the number of VISTA projects being closed, the amount of resources available, and a new sponsor's attributes in relation to the rest of the programming portfolio. For instance, is the applicant organization the sixth university sponsor in a major city where VISTA resources already exist or the first sponsor in a rural area of the state that currently has no VISTA resources? The second example would fill a gap in the State Office's portfolio and would be most likely to receive VISTAs first.

Of course, all sponsors, regardless of organization type, geography or existing status as a sponsor, must have projects designed specifically to fight poverty.

III. Programming Areas

This section outlines poverty-related issues that are legislated programming areas of VISTA. It also provides examples of how VISTA projects might address these areas.

Key Legislation

- Domestic Volunteer Service Act (as amended by Public Law 113-13, April 2009)

- National Service Trust Act (as amended by Public Law 113-13, April 2009)

- Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act (Public Law 113-13, April 2009)

Key Regulations

I. Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Parts 1206, 1210-1211, 1216-1220, 1222, 1226

Legislated Programming Areas

Prior to the Serve America Act of 2009, the DVSA listed programming areas of projects to which VISTAs may be assigned, including work:

> (1) in meeting the health, education, welfare, or related needs of Indians living on reservations or Federal trust lands, of migratory and seasonal farm workers and their families, and of residents of the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, or the Virgin Islands;

> (2) in the care and rehabilitation of mentally ill, developmentally disabled, and other individuals with disabilities, especially individuals with severe disabilities;

> (3) in addressing the problems of the homeless, unemployed individuals, and low-income youths;

> (4) in addressing the special needs connected with alcohol and drug abuse through prevention, education, rehabilitation, treatment, and related activities, consistent with the purpose of VISTA;

> (5) in addressing significant health care problems, including mental illness, chronic and life-threatening illnesses, and health care for homeless individuals (especially homeless children) through prevention, treatment, and community-based care activities;

> (6) in connection with programs or activities authorized, supported, or of a character eligible for assistance under the DVSA or the Community Service Block Grant Act, titles VIII and X of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Head Start Act, the Community Economic Development Act of 1981, or other similar Acts, in furtherance of the purpose of VISTA;

> (7) in strengthening, supplementing, and expanding efforts to address the problem of illiteracy throughout the United States;

The Serve America Act added programming areas, including work:

> (8) in assisting with the reentry and reintegration of formerly incarcerated youth and adults into society, including providing training and counseling in education, employment, and life skills;

> (9) in developing and carrying out financial literacy, financial planning, budgeting, saving, and reputable credit accessibility programs in low-income communities, including those programs that educate individuals about financing home ownership and higher education;

> (10) in initiating and supporting before-school and afterschool programs, serving children in low-income communities, that may engage participants in mentoring, tutoring, life skills and study skills programs, service-learning, physical, nutrition, and health education programs, and other activities addressing the needs of the children;

(11) in establishing and supporting community economic development initiatives, with a priority on work on such initiatives in rural areas and the other areas where such initiatives are needed most;

(12) in assisting veterans and their family members through establishing or augmenting programs that assist such persons with access to legal assistance, health care (including mental health care), employment counseling or training, education counseling or training, affordable housing, and other support services; and

(13) in addressing the health and wellness of individuals in low-income communities and individuals in underserved communities, including programs to increase access to preventive services, insurance, and health services.

Examples of How VISTA Projects Might Address Specific Areas

In fiscal year 2010, Corporation State Offices should give priority to three programming areas: independent living, financial development, and education. Corporation State Offices should consider these programming areas as they relate to their state's local priorities (often in coordination with State Commissions), and, most importantly, the specific needs of local communities.

Independent Living

Each year, millions of adults, some of whom are responsible for the care of children, find themselves unable to or unequipped for successful independent living. Independent living programs help to empower low-income individuals and provide pathways out of poverty. VISTA supports the development of sustainable systems that assist individuals in navigating all of the elements that contribute to living securely and independently.

Housing
VISTA supports programming dedicated to connecting families and individuals to emergency housing and transitional services, providing affordable permanent housing, and encouraging advocacy with populations in need.

In particular, VISTA supports projects that enhance the capacity of community groups to empower individuals to be involved in preserving and maintaining affordable housing and pursue and ensure equitable development and revitalization that is inclusive of residents.

Employment
VISTA supports programming that enables individuals to obtain or train for employment that is sufficient to avoid or exit poverty, provide necessities, and allow individuals to save for the future.

Transition
VISTA supports programming for youth transitioning to adulthood and for adults to access the systems, opportunities, and relationships to successfully live on their own. In particular, VISTA supports programs dedicated to assisting prisoners reentering society and youth aging-out of foster care.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on independent living include:

- VISTAs recruit and mobilize adults to serve as mentors of youth with no support system as they transition to adulthood and seek financial stability and permanent housing.
- VISTAs connect disadvantaged youth with opportunities to advance or complete their education and employment.
- VISTAs develop programming focused on "next-generation workforce development" to move low-income workers to jobs that increase their earning potential.
- VISTAs organize volunteer-based tenant advocacy organizations that ensure decent housing as well as connect residents with local opportunities.
- VISTAs develop community volunteer programs to utilize baby boomers as adult mentors for ex-offenders and their families. Baby boomers mentor ex-offenders in life skills, such as parenting, building relationships, and other vital areas for successful living.
- VISTAs develop community programs that utilize students as volunteers in connecting homeless and elderly veterans with resources that are available to them.

Financial Development

One in four working families (and the 21 million children in those households) is dependent on employment that offers poor job security, low pay, few benefits and little opportunity for advancement. Acquiring equity, financial education, and generating savings are critical to helping move people toward financial stability, recognize and avoid financial predators, begin to reduce the high costs of poverty, increase access to sound financial products and services in low-income communities, and capitalize on financial opportunity.

The United States is experiencing growth in the financial asset disparity between wealthy and low-income Americans. It is estimated that one out of four Americans are asset-poor; they have insufficient net worth for basic necessities for more than three months, even at the poverty level. VISTAs can have a direct impact on developing financially stable communities through financial asset development.

Asset Development
Asset development remains one of the most promising program areas by which VISTAs can truly effect sustainable change in partnership with low-income communities and the organizations serving them. The VISTA program dedicates members to micro enterprise initiatives, which help low-income individuals become self-sufficient by developing their own businesses, and to programs focusing both on general financial literacy and asset savings programs, such as Individual Development Accounts (IDA).

Financial Literacy
In the United States, an estimated 19 million households do not have a savings or a checking account. VISTA supports programs dedicated to empowering individuals and low-income communities to take advantage of opportunities and build wealth that will ultimately lead to an exit from poverty. The ability to budget, plan, manage, and capitalize on financial opportunities are important skills to all, but are vital to those with limited financial resources available. Individual financial literacy is the first line of defense against fraud, deception, and the high financial costs that often plague low-income communities.

Community Economic Development

VISTA supports programming that contributes to the economic development of low-income communities. By improving the sustainable growth in living standards, VISTAs are able to have a lasting impact on the community and build the economic infrastructure that will provide tangible and intangible benefits for residents of the surrounding area.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on financial development include:

- VISTAs recruit volunteers for Volunteer Income Tax Assistance projects (VITA), as well as for outreach activities to inform low-income persons about the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- VISTAs recruit pro-bono financial professionals to host personal finance workshops in rural communities.
- VISTAs develop school-based financial literacy programs, including KIDS Accounts (IDAs for youth), with students, who both benefit from the program and contribute to the program as volunteers, for example, as tellers at youth credit unions.
- VISTAs garner the expertise of retired baby boomers who act as coaches to low-income persons in putting together investment and business plans.

Education

Education continues to be one of the most important components of successfully advancing and securing opportunities. VISTA supports programming that assists individuals and communities through educational opportunities.

Bridging the Digital Divide

Locally, VISTAs continue to play a significant role in helping community organizations assess their technology needs; develop and design technology plans; set up school-based or neighborhood-based computer learning centers; secure resources for hardware and software; and recruit community volunteers for a variety of activities, including hardware installation, instruction, mentoring, and staffing computer laboratories.

Educational Advancement

VISTAs continue to play a role in developing programs that promote education among at-risk children through early childhood education; encourage educational access and assistance to youth; and connect youth with the resources that will lead them to college. The completion of high school greatly affects the chances of one's ability to provide sufficiently for him or her self and to gain a future of prosperity. Pursuing education beyond high school provides more likelihood of a prosperous future.

Knowledge and Technical Skills

VISTAs play a vital role in developing education and skills projects that make individuals more marketable, current, and increase their opportunity for employment and career advancement.

Examples of VISTA projects focused on education include:

- VISTAs initiate after school projects for children from a tribal nation to hone their computing skills.
- VISTAs harness the professional experience of baby boomers by setting up a professional and academic mentoring program.
- VISTAs develop an English program that includes GED preparation in which volunteers begin giving foreign-born individuals an opportunity for prosperous advancement.
- VISTAs recruit students to assist low-income youth in preparing materials, searching, applying for financial aid and scholarships, and applying to colleges on-line.
- VISTAs develop or expand afterschool programming to incorporate healthy life-style curriculum, including a focus on preventing and combating childhood obesity.

IV. VISTA Support

To leverage resources and meet local community needs, VISTA makes use of several types of support for approved VISTA project sponsors. These are described below.

VISTAs

A VISTA makes a year-long, full-time commitment to serve on a specific project at a nonprofit organization or public agency. VISTAs live and serve in some of our nation's poorest urban and rural areas. They do not provide direct services, such as tutoring children or building homes. Instead, they focus their efforts on building the organizational, administrative, and financial capacity of sponsors and apply four key principles (see page 7) in their service.

Leaders

VISTA Leaders serve in large VISTA projects or in regions. Leaders are individuals who have successfully completed a year-long term of service. Their aim is to expand and build the capacity of the VISTAs they lead in coordination with the projects in which they serve. While Leaders do not directly supervise VISTAs, they can play a strategic role in assisting project supervisors with recruitment, retention, and performance.

Summer Associates

Summer Associates are individuals who generally serve 8 - 10 weeks between May and August. Existing sponsors of year-round VISTA projects are eligible to apply to Corporation State Offices for adding Summer Associates to their projects. In developing the concept paper for Summer Associates programming, sponsors incorporate activities that should result in a credible effort to help people escape poverty, not simply make poverty more tolerable. Unlike year-round VISTAs, Summer Associates may carry out direct service activities.

Additional guidance regarding FY 2010 programming for Summer Associates will be issued separately at a later date.

Standard Projects

Standard projects are those projects in which the Corporation places a certain number of VISTAs with a sponsor, and the sponsor funds local operating and logistics costs. In standard projects, VISTAs receive a living allowance biweekly from the Corporation and other benefits as described in the *AmeriCorps VISTA Member Handbook*.

Support and Program Grants

Funds may be awarded to organizations to assist in the support of a VISTA project. Funds can be used for one or more of the following:

- Supervision of the VISTAs, leaders, and summer associates
- Service-related transportation expenses of VISTAs, leaders, and summer associates
- Training for VISTAs and leaders when it is in the interests of the VISTA and VISTA Sponsor advancing the project
- Project staff travel for monitoring sites
- Audits

In some instances, with the approval of the VISTA Director, existing sponsors may be awarded program grant funds to implement the VISTA living allowance.

Cost Share

In order to expand the number of VISTAs that can be supported with the limited federal funding each year, sponsors that have the financial means are encouraged to share a portion of the costs associated with supporting VISTAs. In cost-share, the sponsor covers the living allowance of some or all of its VISTAs. In exchange for this investment, the Corporation covers all the remaining federal program costs for each VISTA. The Corporation pays the VISTAs directly and invoices the sponsors monthly for the living allowance of cost-share VISTAs.

Sponsors may pay their cost share portion on either a pre-pay basis or via monthly reimbursements to CNCS.

While cost-sharing can be an effective means to leverage funding, it should never be considered a requirement for becoming or remaining a VISTA sponsor. VISTA recognizes that many potential sponsors, particularly those most in need of VISTA resource for capacity building, may not be able to support a cost share agreement.

For more information on the cost share partnership, please visit http://www.americorps.gov/for_organizations/apply/vista.asp.

V. Project Models

Single Site Projects

The majority of VISTA projects involve placing one or more VISTAs with a sponsoring sponsor at one location. There is no limit (beyond available funds and sponsor capacity) to the number of VISTAs placed with a sponsor.

When applying through eGrants, the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the project. A single site project model is referred to as "prime" or "prime-only" in eGrants. Figure 1 shows some characteristics of a prime project model.
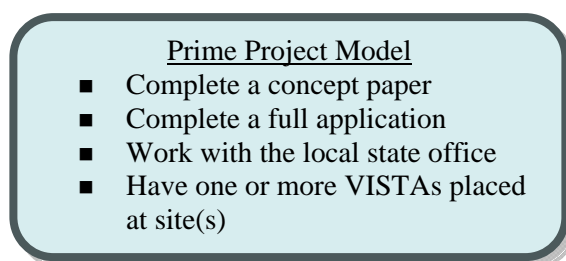
Prime Project Model
- Complete a concept paper
- Complete a full application
- Work with the local state office
- Have one or more VISTAs placed at site(s)

Figure 1. Prime project model

Multi-Site Projects

In multi-site placement projects, VISTAs are placed in a single state through either (a) a sponsor that operates at multiple sites in the community, region, or state or (b) a sponsor that has agreements with local organizations that serve as sub-recipients. The sponsor proposes the number of sites and the number of VISTAs at each site, based on the expected outcomes of the project. Generally, VISTAs in this model work toward large, sponsor-identified goals; however, each site may have different goals.

When applying through eGrants, the Corporation State Office staff determines, in consultation with the prime sponsor, whether the project is a "prime" or "prime plus sub" model. The decision is based on factors such as the amount of responsibility the sponsor takes when there are sub-recipients, magnitude of the project, and proximity of the sites.

If the sponsor applies using the prime project model, the prime sponsor submits one concept paper and full application for the entire project (Figure 1.). If the sponsor is applying using the prime plus sub model, the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the overall project; sub-applications are submitted for the subrecipients in the project. Figure 2. shows some characteristics of a prime plus sub project model.

Using the prime plus sub model offers the sponsor and Corporation State Office several benefits. For example, the sponsor can use the eGrants functionality to hold a competition for its subrecipients. In addition, the sponsor and Corporation State Office can track progress of individual subrecipients. Further, Corporation State Offices are provided with the flexibility to divide the subrecipient management and monitoring responsibilities of a multi-site project among different program specialists.

Multi-State Projects

Sponsors sometimes wish to develop a project that has sites in several states. Sponsors have two options for developing these multi-state projects.

In the first option, sites simply work with each Corporation State Office independently. For example, sites in Alabama work directly with the Alabama State Office, sites in Montana work

directly with the Montana State Office, and so on. When applying through eGrants, sponsors should follow the guidelines for a single site or multi-site project, as described above.

In the second option, the prime sponsor works with one Corporation State Office to coordinate the development of project sites across states. In this option, the sponsor proposes the number of sites and the number of VISTAs at each site, based on the expected outcomes of the project. Generally, VISTAs in this model work toward large, sponsor-identified goals; however, each site may have different outcomes. In development and management of such a multi-state project, the Corporation State Office coordinating the project contacts Corporation State Office staff in the other states with proposed project sites to:

- Inform them that a sponsor is requesting to place a project site in their jurisdiction
- Provide information to enable them to make a determination about the need for such a project in their jurisdiction
- Obtain their approval/disapproval using the eGrants Staff Review process to accept a project site in their jurisdiction

When applying through eGrants in this second option, the Corporation State Office and the applying organization are highly encouraged to use the "prime plus sub" model, where the sponsor submits a concept paper and full application for the overall project; sub-applications are submitted for the sites in the project in each state. Figure 2. shows some characteristics of a prime plus sub project model.
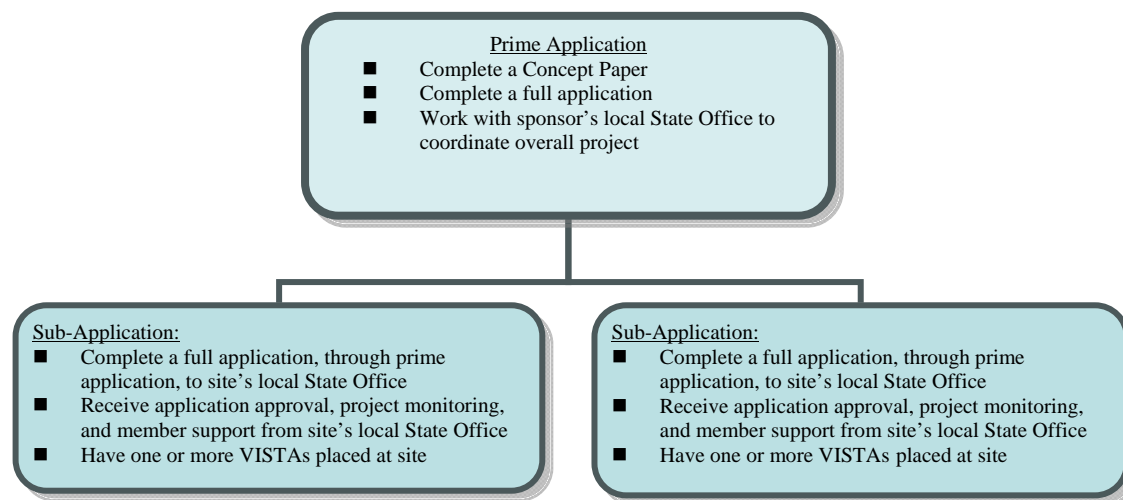

Figure 2. Prime plus sub project model

Involving all Corporation State Offices in which VISTAs are placed is necessary to ensure that:

- Collaboration of activities among organizations working in communities takes place and duplication of activities by other entities is avoided
- Sponsors have not already received VISTA resources in the state for the same purpose
- Requirements for notifying state governors of project activities are fulfilled
- VISTAs are able to receive the support of the local Corporation State Office staff and other local VISTAs during their service
- VISTAs can be included in local in-service training opportunities
- VISTAs can be contacted in the event of a disaster
- Requirements for project monitoring and oversight are fulfilled

- Reporting to Congress, governors, and the public on the location of VISTA activities is accurate

National Demonstration Projects

From time-to-time, VISTA develops national demonstration projects. These demonstration projects, which are initiated and coordinated by VISTA headquarters, have finite terms and have the primary purpose of testing promising concepts tied to the eradication of poverty. At completion, the Corporation assesses performance for the national demonstration project and captures best practices and lessons learned from the demonstration. For FY 2010, VISTA does not anticipate funding national demonstration projects until such time as senior leadership is in place.

VI. Technical Assistance Resources

Corporation State Offices

The Corporation for National and Community Service has field staff working in State Offices throughout the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and American Samoa. The role of the state office is outreach, program development, technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation in support of the Corporation's national service network, and AmeriCorps*VISTA member support. A complete list of State Offices can be found at: http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/contact/stateoffices.asp.

VISTA Campus

The VISTA Campus is an online learning environment for the VISTA community. The aim is to support VISTAs in their development, narrowly defined by professional roles and broadly defined by life's path. The VISTA Campus contains tutorials, courses, resources and links for VISTAs, supervisors, Leaders, Alumni and Corporation staff.   www.vistacampus.org

Resource Center

The **National Service Resource Center** is a web-based clearinghouse that contains over 2,500 downloadable tools and e-courses.   The publications, tip sheets, web links, toolkits, and other resources cover a wide range of topics. Sponsored by the Corporation for National and Community Service, the website makes it easy to find resources that help national service and volunteer programs grow and thrive. http://nationalserviceresources.org/

Technical Assistance

Project STAR is the Corporation's technical assistance provider for performance measurement. On-line toolkits and tutorials provide step-by-step guidance in developing performance measures, creating project plans, and developing data collection instruments. Sample project plans, VISTA assignment descriptions are also available. Access the VISTA-specific Project STAR webpage by going to http://nationalserviceresources.org/star/star and choosing the VISTA topic section.

ListServs

Want to connect with other people working in the national service field? The Corporation sponsors several **listservs** which are targeted towards different audiences and topic areas. Descriptions of the

listserves and instructions on how to sign up can be found on the Resource Center at
http://nationalserviceresources.org/email-lists

External Resources

There are many other online resources which can be helpful to the VISTA community. The following list includes a variety of resources focused on poverty, asset development, and other topics.

Poverty and Poverty-related issues:
- US Census Poverty page: http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/poverty.html.
- Institute for Research on Poverty, Univ. of Wisconsin: http://www.irp.wisc.edu/
- UNC School of Law, Center on Poverty, Work and Opportunity: http://www.law.unc.edu/centers/poverty/default.aspx
- National Poverty Center at University of Michigan: http://www.npc.umich.edu/about_us/
- Rural Poverty Research Center: http://www.rprconline.org/
- University of Kentucky Center for Poverty Research: http://www.ukcpr.org/
- West Coast Poverty Center: http://wcpc.washington.edu/
- HHS, Poverty, Income, and Assets: http://aspe.hhs.gov/_/topic/topic.cfm?topic=Poverty,%20Income,%20and%20Assets
- World Hunger Year: http://www.worldhungeryear.org/default.asp

Asset Development Links:
- California Association for Microenterprise Opportunity - http://www.microbiz.org/
- Micro Business Development Program - http://www.vtmicrobusiness.org/
- National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship - http://www.nfte.com/
- Pact - http://www.pactworld.org/
- The Virtual Library on Microcredit- http://www.gdrc.org/icm/
- Institute for Poverty Research at Northwestern University - http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/abcd/
- CFED - http://www.cfed.org/

VII. My AmeriCorps

Overview

In late August 2009, the My AmeriCorps Portal was re-launched for all three AmeriCorps programs (State/National, NCCC, and VISTA). In addition to improvements in the Recruitment module, new functionality for VISTA sponsors, candidates and members was included. The changes include placement/activation of the VISTAs in the Portal, processing of training requests, approval of the V-81: Project Related Transportation Form and printing of the Sponsor Verification Form (previously faxed).

The My AmeriCorps is available to sponsors via the eGrants system at http://www.nationalservice.gov/egrants/index.asp. User guides and other technical assistance information about My AmeriCorps are available at http://nationalserviceresources.org/ac-training-support